

WATER SUMMIT 2007

July 30, 2007

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

A history of the Central & South Florida Project,
our regional water management system

In the late 1940s after years of severe hurricanes, then drought, then more deadly storms, Florida asked the federal government for a master plan to tame nature's excesses. Central and southern Florida's subtropical extremes – combined with efforts to safely populate this "new frontier" – led the U.S. Congress to adopt legislation creating the Central and Southern Florida (C&SF) Project in 1948, the largest civil works project in the country. Construction began the next year and continued over 20 years as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built the massive flood control plumbing system stretching from just south of Orlando to Florida Bay.

In 1949, the Florida Legislature created the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District, the predecessor to the South Florida Water Management District, to manage the C&SF Project being designed and built by the Corps. In 1972, with the Florida Water Resources Act (Chapter 373), the state created five water management districts, with expanded responsibilities for regional water resource management and environmental protection. In 1976, voters approved a constitutional amendment giving the districts the authority to levy property taxes to help fund these activities.

All five of the state's water management districts' boundaries are determined by watersheds and other natural, hydrologic and geographic features. The South Florida Water Management District is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts.

With headquarters in West Palm Beach, the South Florida Water Management oversees the water resources in 16 counties – from Orlando to the Keys – in central and southern Florida serving a population of approximately 7.5 million people. This region covers 17,930 square miles (about 31 percent of the entire state) and includes vast areas of agricultural lands, water conservation areas, and areas of enormous urban growth and development. The cities of Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Naples, Fort Myers and a portion of Orlando are all within the District's boundaries. The District is divided into two subdistricts or basins, comprised of the Okeechobee Basin and the Big Cypress Basin.

Lake Okeechobee: The liquid heart of the system

At the heart of regional water control system is the 730-square mile Lake Okeechobee, the second largest freshwater lake in the U.S. the lake is a critical habitat for fish and wildlife, it also serves as a water supply source for communities and farms around the lake and as a backup water supply source for millions of residents along Florida's urban southeastern coastal counties. The system connects to three compartmentalized Water Conservation Areas in western Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties. Water Conservation Areas are part of the remnant Everglades and provide significant ecological, water storage and flood control benefits to the region as well as important habitat for wildlife.

Today, as part of its statutory obligations, the South Florida Water Management District acts as the local sponsor and is responsible for the operation of the federal C&SF Project, which includes the operation and maintenance of 1,969 miles of canals and levees of which 1,800 miles are in the C&SF Project and 169 miles are in the Big Cypress Basin, 25 major pumping stations and about 200 larger and 2,000 smaller water control structures. This system serves as the primary flood-control drainage and water supply network with local facilities augmenting this system. Although several key water control structures are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, water management decisions relative to the operation of the majority of the system are made by the South Florida Water Management District.

Conflicting missions

In addition to **regional flood control**, the District's responsibilities include regional flood **water supply** and **water quality protection**, and ecosystem restoration. Balancing these sometimes conflicting missions is a daily challenge for the South Florida Water Management District.

Did you realize that a heavy storm lasting for hours or days can bring as much or more floodwater than a hurricane? During heavy rains, millions of gallons of water are discharged through the C&SF Project to the Atlantic Ocean or Gulf of Mexico to control flooding. There aren't enough water storage areas to absorb Florida's rainfalls for flood control or to save for water supply needs even during the dry season or droughts.

Residents, visitors, businesses and farms within the South Florida Water Management District place a huge demand on the region's water control system originally built 60 years ago to service only 2 million people. It is strained today by population growth and lacks adequate storage and flexibility.

Upgrades to our regional flood control system, vast new water storage reservoirs, expanded treatment wetlands and alternative water supply projects are now under way – all to improve the way we manage water. Florida's weather extremes require a flexible response, and these resources will increase our options in improving flood control, water supply and water quality as well as protecting and restoring our natural systems, including Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades.

